



**TRABAJO DE FIN DE GRADO**

**«A PRAGMATIC STUDY OF FEMALE AND MALE DISCOURSE USE  
ON *FACEBOOK*»**

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## ABSTRACT

Virtual communication is an interesting and innovative field study which analyses the communicative strategies used in this type of discourse, different from the ones used in face-to-face communication. This work first reviews some previous research on the topic to then analyse from a pragmatic perspective the differences between female and male discourse uses on Facebook, without succumbing to a sexist perspective. To carry out this analysis, we resorted to a corpus made with real conversations from *Facebook* to elaborate a 5-point Likert scale, and so conduct an experimental survey to test whether women and men actually use different discourse markers in their respective discourses. The results revealed that there was a statistically significant distinction in the female and male discourse use when communicating on *Facebook*. However, some unexpected results were also obtained regarding the discourse markers used by women in the female young adult group condition, which were very similar to those used by men in both the young adult and adult condition. Hence, the conclusion is that there are distinctive features of both female and male discourse use that allow us to identify the two different gender identities, though young women's discourse use seems to be changing and increasingly resembling to the male discourse. Further research is needed to shed some more light on the change of discourse use found in young women to try to determine its causes.

**Keywords:** *virtual communication, female and male discourse use, Facebook, discourse markers.*

## RESUMEN

La comunicación virtual es un campo de estudio muy interesante e innovador que analiza las distintas estrategias comunicativas empleadas en este tipo de discurso que difieren de las empleadas en la comunicación verbal. Este trabajo empieza revisando investigaciones precedentes en este tema para posteriormente analizar, desde un punto de vista pragmático, las diferencias del uso del discurso femenino y masculino en *Facebook*, sin caer en una perspectiva sexista. El problema principal en este estudio ha sido intentar establecer dicha comparación. Para poder acometer este estudio, recurrimos primero al análisis descriptivo de un corpus creado con discursos reales sacados de la propia red social, para elaborar un cuestionario Likert de 5 puntos, y poder realizar así un estudio experimental que nos permitiera probar si los marcadores textuales utilizados por hombres y mujeres difieren en sus respectivos discursos. Los resultados revelaron una diferencia estadísticamente significativa entre ambos tipos de discursos al comunicarse en *Facebook*. Sin embargo, también obtuvimos algunos resultados inesperados en relación al uso de los marcadores discursivos utilizados por el grupo de mujeres jóvenes que eran muy parecidos a los utilizados por los hombres en ambas condiciones, tanto en los jóvenes como en los adultos. Por esta razón, la conclusión es que existen rasgos distintivos en los usos discursivos femeninos y masculinos, aunque en el caso de las mujeres jóvenes su discurso parece estar cambiando, puesto que se asemeja cada vez más al discurso masculino. No obstante, sería necesario llevar a cabo una investigación sobre el cambio discursivo de las mujeres jóvenes para tratar de establecer sus causas.

**Palabras claves:** *comunicación virtual, uso del discurso masculino y femenino, Facebook, marcadores del discurso.*

## INTRODUCTION

An important development of a new style of communication has emerged in the last two decades. The internet has become the new channel by which people interact and maintain a certain contact with other people around the world. Thus, social networks have become an important media by which people can connect from anywhere, any time.

Social networks are defined as “a website or computer program that allows people to communicate and share internet using a computer or a mobile phone” (Dictionary Cambridge, 2015) and they are part of the sources to communicate on the internet. For this study, I have chosen Facebook because it is composed of many communicative features which are not present in other social networks, such as private chat rooms and a public timeline<sup>1</sup>. The latter provides the users a public source to communicate; even maintain some conversations. This is the reason why I have chosen this social network, considering that it is also one of the most famous, known and used networks around the world.

The aim of this paper is to first describe the main characteristics and linguistic sources of communication via *Facebook* from a pragmatic point of view, to then analyse pragmatically some real interactions among interlocutors on this social network, from where I have taken the corpus<sup>2</sup> for this study. Parts of these interactions will conform the items for an experimental study on female and male discourse use.

Section 1 is subdivided into three parts. The first one deals with a general description of *Facebook* as well as the main characteristics provided by social networks and Facebook, contrasting the virtual and the written discourse. The second sub-section will analyse the linguistic mechanisms used in virtual communication; that is, the discourse markers which contribute to compensate the lack of oral sources (tonality, laughs, etc.). In the third one, we will look at the contextual problems and processes that our cognitive system use to understand the messages via *Facebook* or any others social networks.

Section 2 deals with the main goal of this paper: the female and male discourse. In the first part, we will provide an explanation about the identities (personal, social, interactive) which are created on virtual communication. The second part introduces the aspectual differences and hypothesis in men's and women's discourse which will be analysed in the last

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<sup>1</sup> This term refers to the displaying list on *Facebook* created to exhibit events, comments or images in the order that users upload them.

<sup>2</sup> The corpus that I have chosen for this study is in Spanish, as my interlocutors on Facebook are Spaniards.

part by using a corpus collected from some conversations on Facebook. In section 3, we conduct an experimental survey to demonstrate the distinctions between female and male discourse use.

## 1. THE COMMUNICATION ON INTERNET: FACEBOOK

### 1.1 Main characteristics of virtual communication

Virtual communication is breaking down barriers that have separated people for centuries. The main types of virtual communication are chats and social networks, followed by forums and blogs. Social networks such as *Facebook*, *Instagram*, *Tuenti*, *Twitter*, *Pinterest*, etc. have been the most popular ones for the last ten years. All of them have stirred up the ways of communicating as well as the social relations through the media.

Our first goal is to define and describe the characteristics of virtual communication such as the time and place of interactions, the structure of the channels and the kind of communicative sources available to interlocutors in virtual interactions –paying special attention to the structure of *Facebook* and its functioning as a communicative and interactive platform. Quero (2003: 11) proposes the following table<sup>3</sup> to show the main differences between oral and written communication:

**Table 1. Differences between virtual and face-to-face communication**

<b>VIRTUAL CONVERSATION</b>	<b>FACE-TO-FACE CONVERSATION</b>
1. Textual (written)	Non-textual (oral)
2. Less contextual and non-verbal information (vocal and visual)	Extralinguistic information
3. Weak synchronisation	Full synchronisation
4. Screen	No screen
5. Slower	Less slow
6. No turn-taking	Turn-taking
7. Simultaneous interactions	Less simultaneous interactions
8. Geographic spreading	No geographic spreading
9. Anonymous	Real names

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<sup>3</sup> Translated from the original source.

First, the lack of contextual information is one of the most studied characteristics of virtual communication because it entails the use of communicative strategies to fill that gap. Yus<sup>4</sup> (2005: 147-173) distinguishes between two kinds of conversational issues when communicating on the media: textual messages, and visual and non-verbal communication. The latter comprises all kinds of images, photos or emoticons used for expressing feelings and attitudes. For Yus, virtual communication is a “double informative filter”. The first informative filter is the one established by the implicit information in utterances which we must infer. Whereas the second informative filter is defined as:

[...] in chats there is a second informative filter: the one applied to contextual nonverbal cues (vocal/visual) which are essential to trace the attitudes and feelings which accompany oral discourse. (Yus, 2002: 141)

According to Yus, non-verbal sources are all those mechanisms which compensate the lack of contextual information, for example, emoticons which are useful to express feelings and emotions in a virtual conversation. Thus, the use of a smile can indicate that the other person is happy or being ironic.

Second, people try to communicate their thoughts via social networks in the best possible form, making use of non-verbal sources as tools to facilitate the hearer’s comprehension because written discourse often lacks expressions. That is, it cannot totally express thoughts, whereas in oral discourse, people tend to resort to gestures and the tones of voice to communicate different emotions and the speaker’s attitude. A person cannot express irony through written discourse unless s/he resorts to some strategies, such as the use of dots: “what a beautiful dress...!”

Besides, virtual communication offers the possibility of communicating in real time though interactions can also take place asynchronously, allowing people to participate regardless of the time when communication started. Thus, if a user writes a message in the morning, the rest of the users can answer whenever they want.

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<sup>4</sup> Yus analyses all the sources used for expressing feelings, attitudes and emotions in written discourse. He especially focuses on “textual deformations” consisting on repeating phonemes, exclamatory and interrogative symbols and even using alliteration (i.e. onomatopoeias) in textual language, which will be dealt with in section 1.2.

Finally, they can interact with other people living on the other side of the world. That is, communication is possible between countries, without distance limits and that is why this form of communicative exchange has become more and more popular among people around the world.

These communicative characteristics compose the structure of *Facebook*, a platform where people can access to a private chat window or a timeline to communicate with others. *Facebook*<sup>5</sup> provides users with different ways of interacting: by uploading videos, images, news, quotations or comments. All this semiotic information becomes a source for users to introduce an interactive conversation as well as a way to give information about them. Every communicative act has an intention; so submitting information in the form of images or any other format and using compensatory linguistic sources display an intention on the speaker's side. In this sense, Yus claims that contextualisation and the role of the different communicative channels on the internet are the responsible for undertaking successful or unsuccessful interactions (2002: 145).

When speaking about intentions, we refer to different kinds of intentions (Yus, 2002). First, a user can express an attitude or emotion through their messages. Second, they can save time by using the sources mentioned above, considering that written language takes more time to be produced. Besides, these intentional sources are also useful to indicate the users' presence in the social networks, for example, when a user submits a photo of himself/herself. Finally, the most common intention is an intention to communicate by starting a conversation. All these semiotic sources create an informative context for users in *Facebook* to understand the intentions, whereas people need to sort to other sources in chats.

On the other hand, people on *Facebook* do not resort to nicknames for their identifications as in chat rooms. On the contrary, they usually exhibit their actual name and even the surname. Consequently, the social network gets more similar to real conversations<sup>6</sup>, considering that people present their own identities. Thus, people tend to give more personal and contextual information on *Facebook* than in chats. The latter only concentrates on random

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<sup>5</sup> This paper will only focus on the interactions in the timeline; open to public access. All the news and changes in the timeline are showed in the order in which people upload the information.

<sup>6</sup> Yus (2002: 155-158) details the problems on chat rooms when people use nicknames for their identification. It is mainly a problem for the contextualization. Consequently, chats are less contextual and their information is more difficult to infer than *face-to-face* communication.

information from many people interacting in the same chat room but with different conversations.

In conclusion, virtual communication exhibits a significant number of characteristics. It bears on a double kind of communicative language (written as opposed to visual and interactive sources) as well as on the time and place of interaction. Opposite to face-to-face communication, people can interact depending on the moment in which they can access to the platform or when they decide to participate in the communicative exchange. But the main feature in virtual communication deals with the information provided to or by the users. That is, users create an informative context based on some strategies (semiotic strategies and compensational linguistic sources).

## **1.2 Linguistic sources: the virtual written discourse**

The aim in this section is to study the mechanisms users usually use in written communication either in chats or social networks. The idea is to demonstrate that in some cases written language differs from oral discourse.

López Quero (2003: 12) says that the written discourse of chat rooms and social networks is increasingly more similar to oral language. He also indicates that linguistics has always established an edge to separate both languages. However, the apparition of chat rooms and social networks has supposed a change in such dichotomy. Nowadays, with the exception of formal e-mails, most forms of written communication do not display any strict formality but they include many sources from oral communication, for example expressions of feelings and emotions by using repetitions of letters/symbols or emoticons.

Furthermore, Yus (2002: 154) considers that virtual texts can be a hybrid between oral and written language. Users resort to mechanisms to substitute the lack of contextual information. For example, Yus distinguishes between two groups of mechanisms: “oral versus written” and “visual versus verbal” (2002: 1159, 161). The latter contains sources related to non-oral language compensation, such as: “repetition of phonemes”, “expressive use of punctuation symbols” and the “reproduction of sounds in written transcriptions”.

For example, when someone says *hello*, s/he writes it in the following way: “Helloooooo!!!! Hahaha”, repeating the vowel “o” and the exclamation symbol, as it sounds in oral language, to express joyfulness of talking with the other person. This laughter can also



indicate joy or humour when speaking with the other, depending on the context of the conversation.

On the other group, Yus lists some visual sources which compensate frequent behaviours in oral communication. For example, the emoticons are employed as a source to express feelings because they can show different gestures: smiles, sorrows, tears and many others. All these strategies form what Yus calls “textual deformation” (2005). Nevertheless, he does not deal with other mechanisms such as deictic expressions (*here, I, now*), different ways to express irony (for example, by using dots: I’m really happy...) or the use of abbreviations, as mathematics symbols or numbers: “Friends 4ever”. These strategies substitute the phatic function<sup>7</sup> which holds the receiver’s<sup>8</sup> attention during face-to-face communication. Besides, they also conform the basis of the analysis of how people are capable of inferring information from these complex linguistic mechanisms.

### 1.3 Pragmatics: Processes and problems in utterance interpretation

After having analysed the characteristics of virtual communication, and compared and contrasted verbal and written discourse, this section deals with the interpretation processes that the hearer must undertake to be able to interpret speaker’s meaning.

When speakers communicate, their utterances are processed within a context that enables the hearer to interpret the speaker’s utterances. Words sometimes are not enough to communicate all our feelings and thoughts so we must sort to other sources. *Cyberpragmatics* certainly deals with the way in which people can communicate implicit messages through virtual interactions and how they infer the information in the way intended by the sender (Yus: 2001).

The aforementioned paralinguistic strategies (semiotic and compensational linguistic mechanisms) are useful to express all those things that words cannot say and to compensate the lack of oral sources (gestures, intonation, etc.) to communicate feelings and attitudes:

The first informative loss in chat rooms is the one that take places between the sender’s typed text and the sender’s intended interpretation, which has to be filled inferentially. And the lack of

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<sup>7</sup> The phatic function does not convey any information but it has a social task consisting on catching the hearer’s attention and starting or finishing a conversation. It is defined by Jakobson’s theory about *The Functions of Language*.

<sup>8</sup> I refer to *sender* and *receiver* as the equivalents of “speaker and hearer” on virtual communication

nonverbally conveyed contextual information (vocal and visual) essential to communicate attitudes and emotions. (Yus 2005: 149)

Thus, the main problem in the interpretation of utterances has to do with the gaps that must be filled. A major effort is necessary to infer the information when the utterances are typed or written because the context of the utterance does not convey as information as in oral discourse. Hence, users must resort to textual deformation, emoticons and all these compensational strategies which fill the informative gap derived from the context of the utterance. Therefore, *Facebook* displays the possibility of submitting audio-visual sources which are also part of this inferential process, regarding the extension of information that these sources provides.

For example, if someone publishes a photo of himself/herself in a party with a comment like: “It was amazing! Thank you guys!” we can infer that s/he is referring to that party and guys. However, if the user only publishes the comment, we cannot know the reference of such publication unless we previously know that he was in a party.

The “context”<sup>9</sup> provides the necessary information to fill the gap of inferences. For example, if we find an utterance such as the following one in *Facebook*: “This is what I did in my Lengua 1 Class today” we will not be able to understand it completely unless we are provided with further information. To obtain the propositional form of an utterance, we would need to know who the sender is, where s/he is, and when s/he refers to by saying “today”. We need to assign a (personal, temporal and situational) reference to this information. Hence, *Facebook* supplies some data which are part of the contextual environment. Thus, it is easier for users to infer the propositional content of the utterance, as the effort needed to infer the information is smaller.

Given that this referential information is supplied by the social network, we only need to determine the sender’s intention from his/her verbal and non-verbal language. For example, the user adds a smiling face at the end of her discourse so that the hearer can infer that the user is glad or happy. This emoticon supposes an inferential process dealing with non-verbal and visual language. But how do the users proceed to carry out that inferential process?

According to Sperber and Wilson’s *Relevance Theory* (1995), Yus (2008:635-636) states that by using emoticons or any kind of textual deformation, the contextual effects increase

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<sup>9</sup> The context is composed of encyclopaedic knowledge, immediately physical environment and preceding utterances.

and users need a minor effort to process the information. Hence, the assumptions about the sender's feelings become more salient to users. That is, the use of emoticons facilitates the recovery of the implicit feelings, not reflected in written language. Thus, the receivers must make a major effort to interpret speaker's intended intention.

## **2. FEMALE AND MALE DISCOURSE USE**

This section focuses on how men and women communicate on *Facebook*. Therefore, I will introduce a corpus, containing some expressions from both the female and male discourse, to show the differences as a way to create new identities.

Nevertheless this study will only consider the differences between female and male discourse use on *Facebook*, from a semantic and pragmatic point of view. Although some theories (such as Lakoff's<sup>10</sup> theory) implicate that women's discourse is suppressed in many occasions by men's discourse, this work will not address the issue of sexism directly, but the differences between female and male discourses.

### **2.1 Creation of identities on social networks: the case of *Facebook***

The virtual discourse creates different positions for the user facing the rest of the people, according to Yus (2014: 401) who establishes three identities in the discourse of *Facebook*: "social, personal and interactive". Thus, the user presents his/her personal information by uploading photos, links, etc. and s/he controls her/his own publications ("enhanced self")<sup>11</sup> creating thus a personal identity.

Submitting some information on the Internet or *Facebook* is related to the social identity because the user's intention is just to communicate something to the rest of the people s/he shares such information with. When users join this kind of channels, they are part of a community and consequently, a social image is spontaneously created.

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<sup>10</sup> Robin Lakoff is an American Linguist whose studies are based on language and gender. Her book *Language and woman's place* (1975) deals with an important study of female languages in linguistics.

<sup>11</sup> Yus explains Goffman's theory which analyses the personal identity in social life. The expression "enhanced self" deals with the criticism of people who manipulate their personal information to present a better image of themselves in front of the rest. Yus compares Goffman's theory with the phenomenon on *Facebook* where people submit information according to their own interests to enhance their image (2014).

However, the most important point here is the interactive identity defined by Yus as a “bridge” between the two other identities –the personal and the social- (Yus 2014: 401). This identity states the personal and social presences in the virtual scope; that is, the users resort to personal information, for example, photos to establish a social interaction with other users on *Facebook* (Yus, 2014: 413). Therefore, this interactive identity only turns up in virtual discourses, whereas the personal and the social identity are present in daily oral discourse: our personality conditions our own discourse; as well as our social image. Yus (2014: 401) states: “La identidad se puede definir como un sentimiento del yo como individuo o del yo en relación a los demás, conocida como identidad colectiva o social.” Consequently, the interactive identity emerges from these two identities when they are present in the virtual discourse.

Moreover, Yus points out that *Facebook* provides people with some typical aspects from both real and virtual life. Thus, a “hybridization” of physical and virtual sources takes place. By using textual deformation, users try to compensate the contextual conditions between the verbal and non-verbal behaviours (Yus 2014: 417). For example, the use of a smiling emoticon produces a contextual reproduction of the user’s feelings.

Besides, there are many social and personal aspects which influence on the creation of those identities. Gender and age also interfere at this point with the creation of an identity as I will show later on. A teenager or a young person does not communicate as an adult does. Neither a girl communicates as a boy does. Teenagers usually resort to slang when they are talking with their friends. But when they talk with adults, they usually express themselves in a more formal register. This change causes a moulding in their personal and social identity.

Regarding gender, the consequences are the same: there is a creation of an identity. Our goal in this section of the paper is to show the differences between female and male discourses on *Facebook*. Thus, we will distinguish two identities: one created by women and another one created by men; and both of them will be part of the personal, social and interactive identities.

Yus states that “*Facebook* ofrece un entorno ideal para el moldeado de identidades” (Yus 2014: 419) and the speech becomes essential to shape this identity as well as the user’s position when interacting and publishing contents within the social network (Yus, 2014). Every element in an interaction can display a little evidence of every personal, social and interactive identity. For example, the publication of a user’s selfie in a party displays much information about her/his personal plans or hobbies. Besides, the publication shows social and interactive

features, because the sender intends friends to interact with her/him and to show a reaction to such a photo.

It is also possible to analyse the different markers men and women use when communicating on *Facebook*. For example, topics of publications in the timeline (videos, comments, images, links to other websites, etc.) can be a clue to know the gender identity, considering that women tend to make more publications related to fashion, animals and beauty; whereas men tend to publish more issues regarding sports, jokes, politics, etc. This is only a general stereotypical image because we can find sometimes common publications between them. But, in general, there is a difference between men's and women's interactions. Such differences are also available in the communicative markers men and women use, such as: vocabulary, style, grammar, etc. We will analyse these aspects following Lakoff's theory<sup>12</sup> about the distinction of discourses.

To conclude, virtual communication provides much information even though oral communication is composed of more paralinguistic and non-verbal sources; but virtual language is capable of providing information with other sources (textual deformation, submitted publications: photos, videos, etc.). As a result of this phenomenon, the interactive identity is created within the virtual field along with the other two identities (i.e., the personal and the social one).

## **2.2 Aspectual differences and hypothesis in men's and women's discourse**

In general terms, the main differences between the female and male discourse are the vocabulary and the style. In the female discourse, not only the vocabulary used is considered, but also some morphological processes such as diminutives. According to the style, some other aspects are to be considered: -, namely questions, answers, rhetorical figures or the use of assertive particles ('I think', 'I guess'). All these mechanisms seem to function differently female and male discourse. However, pragmatics should be able to analyse the speakers' intention when using these aspects to point out any possible differences between both types of discourses. The aim of this research is to test this hypothesis, i.e, to see whether there is any difference between men's and women's discourse in virtual interactions and its actual variations from the oral discourse.

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<sup>12</sup> Lakoff proposes some linguistic aspects of women's discourse differing from men's discourse.

According to Lakoff's theory (Acuña, 2011: 13), many aspectual differences are obvious in conversations between men and women. Lakoff states that women's discourse tends to be weaker and more insecure than men when talking. Acuña gives some reasons about such insecurities in women's language which have been studied as a feeling of inferiority, in terms of the social categorisation of women in the past: that is, the roles of women in society (salary differences, education, even the social status depended on their husbands or fathers).

However, no-convincing evidence has been offered, since much research contradicts this theory with other points of views. Coates and Holmes state that women's variation in discourse is used to avoid offence. Thus, the differences in their discourse are more related to "politeness strategies":

Estimular el desarrollo de la interacción, atenuar o matizar las afirmaciones para no imponer los puntos de vista propios y mantener el contacto con el interlocutor, son algunos de los principales rasgos que definen el habla de las mujeres como un discurso "más cortés" que el de los hombres (...). (Acuña, 2011: 28)

This research, based on Politeness Theory, considers that the linguistic sources applied by women and men are part of a communicative style. Acuña (2011: 29) points out that women tend to sort to negative politeness<sup>13</sup> strategies when communicating. This idea contradicts that from Lakoff about women's inferiority. Female language is thus observed as more polite, rejecting the idea that women act as submerged individuals because of their social categorisation. Acuña (2011: 28) defends the distinction of female communicative style as an affective character contrasting with men's competitive and individualist character.

The aspectual differences between both discourses are evident. Firstly, vocabulary of an emotional nature gains a large field on women's language. Men tend to be stronger when communicating and not to demonstrate their emotions in the same way as women do. For example, women tend to be more emotional when they say goodbye to someone: "Besos guapas." However, men are not as emotional in a similar situation: "A ver si nos vemos, máquina." Women send love and a compliment ("guapas"), whereas men are more distant in terms of affection.

Moreover, the lexicon in women's language is plenty of affective adjectives such as: "cariño", "monada", and "precioso". The range of colour terms use is also wider than in men's:

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<sup>13</sup> Negative politeness consists in showing respect towards the interlocutor by using honorifics, hedging, apologizes, indirectness, etc., whereas positive politeness deals with closeness, a more confident attitude, familiarity, solidarity, etc. among other strategies.

“púrpura”, “celeste”. Consequently, this kind of lexicon is a very distinguishable marker of female discourse. In addition, women tend to produce interjections different from those used by men, such as “Oh, my goodness!” , many of which are considered euphemistic expressions to avoid swearing whereas men are more derogatory and often turn to rude vocabulary: “mierda”, “hasta los cojones”, “hostia”:

Anger is the emotion most expected and tolerated from men. (...) The power of anger, including the power of some swearing, probably arises primarily from its capacity to produce fear, to intimidate. Of course, anger does not always intimidate. Women’s anger is often repositioned as frustration or emotional “upset”, framed as nonthreatening and, indeed, as rendering its subject vulnerable. “You’re so cute when you’re mad.”

(Eckert and Mc-Connell-Ginet: 2003, 182)

Women, on the other hand, tend to use more diminutive and superlative adjectives as well as boosters<sup>14</sup>, which are a further evidence of affection in their speech. It means that women’s emotional character is usually reflected in their language by using specific features which are less common in men’s speech. This phenomenon creates the feeling of closeness between women and their recipients. Thus, they can use expressions such as “¡Qué perrito tan mono!” or “¡Estoy tan feliz de que estés aquí!” These expressions emphasize an emotional attitude through the hearer. Men, on the other hand, do not usually speak so affectively as to express it in this way.

In addition, we can identify other distinctions regarding the communicative style. Lakoff explains the use of tag questions by females which “refuerza la imagen de las mujeres como personas inseguras” (Acuña, 2011: 13) according to Lakoff’s theory about female weakness in their social categorisation. She also adds other questions used as an answer which also indicates insecurity: “¿Cuándo te gustaría quedar? - ¿Mañana?” The latter is an answer to the former, by which the sender tries to be assertive without imposing on the hearer. She manifests an emotional insecurity because she does not answer with an assertion but with another question. On the contrary, men tend to be more assertive in their responses.

Acuña proposes two groups to distinguish the classification of tags in speech: on the one hand, she identifies “modal” tags –when the sender waits for an answer- and “affective politeness” tags –to soften down the tone and/or stimulate the conversation- (Acuña, 2011: 29).

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<sup>14</sup> Boosters are used to amplify the affective emotion: super, mega, etc.

The first type is more common in male discourse whereas the latter is more frequent in female discourse, although both types of tag questions are possible in both speeches.

Rhetorical questions are also common among women (Acuña 2011: 29), which the sender uses as a sign to continue the conversation and, on the other hand, to check whether the receiver is paying attention to the sender attract the recipient's attention. Some typical expressions are: "¿En serio?", "¿Entiendes?" But they also function as politeness and affective strategies to express shared experiences among the users. In oral language, we clearly identify which function is accomplished with the intonation of the utterance; but in virtual communication this is not possible and we must sort to other elements (such as textual deformation and emoticons) to know the speaker's intended meaning.

Moreover, Acuña (2011: 30) notes another characteristic of female speech, considered by Lakoff as another sign of weakness: the "epistemic modality" which consists on using short particles/fillers to attenuate the assertive force of the utterance, for example: "I think", "I guess", etc. But Acuña states that this is again a source of negative politeness: to attenuate the imposition of receivers' opinions. Men tend to use a more assertive style to avoid questions. In general, their style is more pejorative and sarcastic. They also use rude words and swear words: "mierda", "joder".

This analysis gives rise to the hypothesis about the existence of a distinction between female and male discourse in virtual communication (*Facebook*). The intention of this paper is to offer some evidence to distinguish when women or men are talking and to demonstrate that we can identify each gender by the different discourse markers found in their discourse.

To sum up, two general groups have been established to distinguish aspectual differences in female and male discourses: the style of the discourse and vocabulary, as part of the evidences to prove the hypothesis of this work. The main aim is to set up a general paradigm which contributes to identify their main features within daily conversational situations to prove the hypothesis that both types of discourse use possess several distinctive communicative features. This hypothesis leads us to analyse a corpus taken from *Facebook*, considering that virtual communication differs from face-to-face communication in that the former there are no extralinguistic sources such as intonations or gestures.



## 2.3 Corpus: presentation and analysis of the discourse markers

To verify the hypothesis previously introduced, I present the following corpus based on actual conversations carried out on *Facebook*. The interactions have been put into three groups: one for women, one for men and the last one with interactions of men and women, i.e. neutral ones. The idea is to analyse the different markers in each conversation (vocabulary, syntax, style, etc.) pragmatically to draw our own conclusions.

Due to the lack of English speakers to create a corpus, I decided to conduct the survey with Spanish speakers. The interventions will be showed without nicknames or real names to respect the privacy of the people chosen as part of the corpus. Besides, the dialogues will be showed literally as the users have written them.<sup>15</sup> The ages of the users are from 18 to 26.

### 2.3.1 Female discourse:

- (1) User 1: ¿Podéis creer que tardé meses en enterarme de que los pantalones de Mateo llevaban una gomita por dentro para ajustárselos?? Jaja 🙈  
Y también lo tienen los pantalones de embarazada!!!  
¿A alguna más le pasó o soy yo la única? ¿Alguna que vaya a ir ahora corriendo al armario de su hijo porque no tenía ni idea?? Jaja 😊  
User 2: En serio??? Ahora te has dao cuenta??? Pero si hasta los de bebé tienen eso!!! Y es superpractico... tu imagina la de bebes diferentes que hay: con mucha barriguita, regordete, estiraillos, sin barriguita... imagina el loo de tallas que habría... jajajajajaja. Un beso guapa, que bonita eres!!!  
User 1: Nooo ya hace mucho, pero si tardé tiempo!!! Un besín!!  
User 3: Para que pensabas que era entonces esa goma? XD  
User 1: Pues no recuerdo muy bien, pero imagino que pensaría que sería para que se dieran más o menos como una cintura de goma de un chándal  
User 4: Eso es porque tu hijo no es un palillo. Si no ya lo hubieses encontrado hace tiempo!!  
User 1: ahora está más delgadito pero de más crío no lo estaba, por eso debió ser!

In this conversation, many evident features make women's discourse particular. First, the interaction starts with a modality of questions, as shown above, functioning as tag or rhetorical questions: "¿Podéis creer?" User 1 initiates the conversation appealing the attention of the rest. User 2 answers with two other tag questions: "En serio? ¿Ahora te has dado cuenta?" The first

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<sup>15</sup> Thus some evidences of orthographic and grammatical errors will be shown.

question seems to invite the others to participate in the conversation, whereas the rest of questions are rhetorical questions: “¿Ahora te has dado cuenta?” Or “¿Para qué pensabas que era entonces?”

Second, there is an example of epistemic modality which functions in that condition: “pero imagino que pensaría que (...).” In this case, the user expresses doubt not only by the use of particles but by the verbal tense (conditional) which indicates that the user is hesitant and insecure. Probably, her intention was to soften down her answer to the question from User 3, which could be interpreted as a mock, or sarcasm. User 3 makes the question as a way to indicate that it was obvious the use of the elastic band.

Furthermore, there are many examples of use of affix use in the vocabulary. The word “superpráctico” is a mere example of an amplifier. The prefix “super” in Spanish is frequently used by women. In the same way, the diminutives are much resorted in the conversation: “barriguita”, “regordete”, “estiraillos”, “besín” and “delgadito”.

Besides, women resort to affective vocabulary to address others: “guapa”, “bonita”. Although men also use them sometimes when communicating with women, these words are common among females as an emotional treatment. It is not usual to find men using these kinds of words.

The last marker to analyse is the *textual deformation* which will be compared below with those from men’s conversations. First, users employ some emoticons: a monkey covering its face, a smile and a loud laugh. The first one actually represents an ashamed person even though the emoticon is a monkey. The expression of embarrassment is more usual in women than in men, considering that they tend to be more expressive in terms of emotions. Thus, it is not usual to find such an emoticon in a male conversation, as we will show later on.

Besides, there are many cases of repetitions of exclamation and interrogative symbols, especially in questions expressing amazement (“En serio???”) or to say goodbye (“Un besín!!!”). This deformation demonstrates again women’s emotional expressions. Moreover, User 2 resorts continually to dots, for instance, when she said: “es súper práctico...” In this case, User 2 displays a positive reaction to what User 1 said. But in other contexts, this use of dots can be interpreted as an irony, for example if the same User thought the contrary and she said: “es súper práctico...” to mean that it is actually useless.

- (2) User 1: Gracias [User 4<sup>16</sup>] no solo por este detallazo de la mini colombina, también por cómo eres con nosotras. Te queremos!! ♥♥♥
- User 2: Muchisiiiiimas gracias [User 4], precioso el detalle y buenísimo el día de hoy y la comidita sobre todooo, te queremos mucho guapaaa ♥♥♥
- User 3: [User 4] eres genial!!!! Muchas gracias por todo lo q haces por nosotras y lo bien q te portas. Eres un encanto!! Preciosa la muñequita ☺ otra comidita prontoooo x favoor. Besos guapas
- User 4: Me alegra muchiiisimo que os haya gustado :P Espero que hayáis pasado unos carnavales inolvidables porque os lo merecéis :P Yo también quiero mas comiditas como las de hoy!!!! Sois todas unas niñas lindísimas, es lo mínimo que podía hacer. Tengo que decir que estas muñequitas las ha hecho mi [Unknown user].
- User 5: Muchas gracias [User 4] eres un encanto y esperamos que sigas acompañándonos en lo que nos queda: D:D ♥
- User 6: Si esq [User 4] es un amoooooooo!!!! Cuidadla muuuucho!!! :D oo
- User 7: Anitaaa muchas graciaaaas! Ha sido un regalito precioso y un recuerdo muy bonito! Un beso enorme

Many of the discourse markers previously analysed are repeated in this example. For instance, all those aspects related to vocabulary such as: diminutives (“comidita”, “muñequita”, “regalito”), even with proper names as “Anita”. They also use another feature which does not appear in example (1): boosters (“buenísimo”, “lindísimas”) which emphasizes the affection and liking towards the other girls. Moreover, they emphasize these words by using *textual deformation*, such as namely letter repetition: “Muchisiiiiimas”, “muchiiisimo”. Even though they do not resort to morphological suffixes to modify the word, they underline them with *textual deformation*: “guapaaa”, “x favoor”, “es un amoooooooo!!!!”, “cuidadla muuuucho!!!” This is another way to use booster without resorting to affixes.

On the other hand, the lexicon deals again with female affective markers such as “precioso/a”, “guapa”. As well as the expressions: “eres un encanto”, “es un amor”, “estas muñequitas las ha hecho mi [proper name]”. These are all adjectives referring to other women, who use a proper women’s lexicon (i.e. “encanto”, “precioso”, etc) among them, as observed. According to virtual language, this conversation provides a major number of emoticons. Most of them indicates love with a heart, which is unlikely in male discourse.

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<sup>16</sup> In this conversation, user 4 has published a photo of a present.

By observing these common features in both conversations, can be proved that women build their own identity when speaking, even in virtual communication. Even so, it is necessary to verify more common features with other examples.

(3) User 1: [She publishes a new about famous standing up for homosexual marriages when they want to have children]

User 2: Es vergonzoso que los propios gays critiquen que unos niños no puedan ser cuidados y amados por otros gays! Y gracias a las “madres de alquiler” hay niños que vienen a este mundo! Penosoooo!

User 3: Son idiotas! Boicot a D&G

User 4: Es que son tontos del culo!! Renegar de si mismo, es lo peor que existe!!!!

I include this example in the corpus because it seems to be relevant to compare it with male conversations regarding vocabulary. In this, women are complaining about a topic, whereas the rest of examples deal with more friendly attitudes and opinions about a particular topic. Hence, women do not use the same features in this conversation as in the rest because their emotional attitude expresses anger.

There are pejorative words and expressions such as: “idiotas”, “penoso” and “vergonzoso”, “tontos del culo” which seem to suggest that women are more vulnerable than men when they get angry. Men tend to employ more swearing –“cojones”, “mierda”-, whereas women tend to resort to euphemistic expressions which soften down their speech –“jo”, “¡anda!”, etc.

### **2.3.2 Male discourse:**

(4) User 1: [He publishes the photo of a roundabout from his town]

User 2: Qué coño es eso?

User 1: Un marmotreto puertorraleño jajajaja. Vete tú a saber, [user 2]...

User 2: Algo que había por Dragados y no sabían dónde colocarlo fijo XD

User 2: a ver si le hacen unos grafitis de colorines y bonitos, pa que tenga otro toque porque vaya tela. Aunque yo hubiere preferido arbolitos y matorrales como en las otras, la verdad xD

User 1: Quedaba mejor sin nada encima. Valiente chapucería.

User 3: Ahora se dedican a colocar truños simbólicos en las rotondas. Coge a uno de los que se pegan en la playa Victoria 12 horas al día para hacer una escultura de arena y diles que hagan una en la rotonda y les das 50 euros pa que sobrevivan 1 día más, cojones. Que esto parece que lo han sacado de Mars Attack.

At first sight, there are some differences with female discourse, not only regarding the topic, but also the mechanisms employed in the speech. As aforementioned, men use ruder vocabulary. For example, User 2 says “coño” and User 3 employs the swear word “*cojones*”. This vocabulary is considered dysphemistic and frequent among young people’s or teenager’s speech, just as: “fijo”, “truño”, which could be considered slang terms.

In this conversation User 1 submits a photo with intent to initiate a discussion, as in example [1]. The difference lies that, in this example, men’s opinions have a more pejorative sense, given rise to criticism and invite people to participate in the conversation with complaining or mockery attitudes as the rest of men do. However, in women’s example, they provide their opinions with knowledge of the elastic band.

Besides, diminutives are also used in this conversation in an ironic way, not to express affectivity as in the female discourse example: “unos grafitis de colorines”, “yo hubiese preferido arbolitos y matorrales”. It is possible to analyse an ironic attitude if we consider that these words usually express a more assertive attitude about the user’s preference: “yo hubiese preferido árboles y matorrales.” However, the use of diminutives make readers interpret them as the speaker being ironic, and so displaying a dismissive attitude.

Another male marker to keep in mind is the use of assertive expressions as: “vete tú a saber”, “fijo”, “la verdad” or “valiente chapucería”. They do not incite to continue the conversation with a phatic function of the language as women do by using tag questions. Women would use expressions like: “Yo hubiese preferido arbolitos y matorrales como en las otras, ¿verdad?” This tag question (“¿verdad?”) invites others, in some way, to continue the conversation. Men just use “la verdad” at the end of the utterance to finish their intervention.

The only example of question is the first intervention by User 2: “¿qué coño es eso?” This is not a case of rhetorical question as in the female discourse, but a dysphemism to indicate displeasure and criticism towards the publication from User 1.

According to virtual language, the use of emoticons in this conversation also shows a difference between male and female speeches. The users employ the emoticon of loud laugh represented with the letters *X* and *D*. The information provided by this emoticon (*XD*) displays a mocking or ironic attitude about the photo if we consider the utterances. For instance, the pejorative use of diminutives makes us interpret the emoticon as ironic or mocking.

- (5) User 1: K buena cara mi gaditano cantaor de chirigotas jajaja aver si nos vemos este finde makina  
 User 2: Mario ese bigote no es reglamentario ya te estás afeitando!!  
 User 3: Jajajaja ruben!!! Este finde se lía el taco!! ;)  
 User 1: Lo veo jajaja

In this conversation, I mainly distinguish three markers. The first one is about the way in which User 1 addresses to the publisher by calling him “makina”, a typical slang term, while women employed words in the conversations above, such as: “guapa”, “te queremos”, etc. Therefore, it seems that men use words with less affective load in their original meaning as a tool or gadget. However, in this context, the term has a metaphorical sense dealing with the image of a remarkable, high-skilled person.

We have said that male discourse tend to be more assertive than the females. In this example, the comment by User 2 shows it by saying “ya te estás afeitando” interpreted as an order to his friend. However, women tend to employ questions to be more polite in the communicative process.

A further difference, regarding both types of discourses is the way in which men and women refer to future plans. In this conversation User 3 says: “Este finde se lía el taco!!” However, in the second example of women’s conversations they use utterances such as: “otra comidita prontooo x favoor” or “yo también quiero mas comiditas como las de hoyy!!!!” Men resort to slang again whereas women make their speech more affective by using diminutives.

### **2.3.3 Mixed conversation (men & women):**

- (6) User 1 [male]: A aquellos moradores que comparten pared conmigo, espero que el próximo día que llueva y tiréis vuestra mierda a mi casa, llenando la pared del patio de barro y atascando el sumidero, os resbaléis y deis una buena ostia contra el suelo, sin más mal que el de un moratón, bien visible, del mismo color que el de aquello con lo que llenáis mi patio de porquería (...).  
 User 2 [female]: en serio?  
 User 1 [male]: muy en serio, me tienen hasta los cojones. Se creen que no hay nadie en casa y tiran su mierda al patio del vecino... después son los más limpios del mundo XD  
 Y hoy además han estado a punto de mojarme los soplá... Pililas...  
 User 2 [female]: jajajajajajajaja no quiero imaginar que habría pasado si te hubieran mojado

User 1 [male]: lo gracioso alguna que otra vez han venido a mi casa, estando mi madre sola a echar cojones encima

User 3 [female]: Que alegría de vecinoooo

This conversation deals with a complaining publication and demonstrates some evidences about the differences in both types of discourse. Male vocabulary is composed by swear words (“mierda”, “cojones”) showing a rude attitude when complaining. However, women are softer and resort once more to rhetorical questions (“en serio?”) and answers (“Que alegría de vecinoooo”). Another common feature, as we have previously analysed, is the use of irony by men. In this example, there is such use represented again by an emoticon of a guffaw (XD) used by User 1: “después son los más limpios del mundo XD”.

Once the different aspects characterising female and male discourse have been considered, the pragmatic process underlying them will be analysed. Yus (2008: 633-641) proposed *Relevance Theory* to understand how human cognition can interpret virtual communication. Thus, the lack of oral markers should imply more processing effort. However, in this analysis, we have claimed that male and female discourse use can be distinguished by the linguistic and paralinguistic elements such as vocabulary, textual deformation, emoticons, morphological changes, syntax, etc., used as clues by hearers to recover the speaker’s intended meaning in the utterances.

For example, the two main words in the utterance<sup>17</sup> “preciosa la muñequita” suggest that they have hardly been pronounced by a man, due to their emotional force. That is, the use of female markers entails an affective attitude absent from the male discourse, as we have seen above. Thus, the contextual effect produced by this utterance allows us to identify it as a female discourse, without involving a large effort.

The same occurs when a person completes his/her intervention with an emoticon, especially with those representing hearts. In this case, the emoticon adds new –paralinguistic– information to the utterance interpretation. Probably, one of the first assumptions we get is that the hearts have been published by a woman, especially if it is next to a comment such as: “guapa” or “besitos”. If these words are used in the utterance. When someone sees an emoticon of a heart, s/he recognises immediately that it means ‘love’, allowing the derivation of some contextual effects with almost no processing effort.

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<sup>17</sup> Considering that we do not know the identity of the person speaking.

### 3. EXPERIMENTAL SURVEY

The goal of the experiment was to investigate the distinction between men's and women's use of discourse regarding the different markers which are involved in each speech (diminutives, slang, tag questions, etc.)

#### 3.1 METHODS

##### *Participants*

Forty-eight Spanish native speaker adults volunteered to participate in this study. None had taken part in the pretest (see below). Subjects were divided into two age groups: twenty-four undergraduates from the University of Cadiz aged 18-26 years old, and twenty-four participants aged 27-60 years old. In each group there were twenty-four women and twenty-four men. As stated in the introduction, the aim of the study was to test whether age and gender affect the use of discourse markers in the social networks.

##### *Materials*

Sixteen sentences were conscientiously selected as items from *Facebook*. All the expressions were previously checked for frequency of use in men or women from over 100 *Facebook* users. Seven of them contained expressions or features frequently used in male discourse (items 2, 4, 6, 11, 12, 13 and 14<sup>18</sup>) and other seven expressions were characteristic of female discourse (items 1, 3, 5, 7, 8, 9 and 16). Furthermore, two neutral expressions were added to check the results (items 10, 15). The experimental items were mixed and presented in a fixed random order. A five-point Likert scale was constructed for each of the sixteen items, ranging from "strongly agree" on one end to "strongly disagree" on the other with "neither agree nor disagree" in the middle. Each level on the scale was assigned a numeric value, starting at 1 and incremented by one for each level. All experimental items appear in Appendix 1.

In a plausibility pretest, twelve participants (six men and six women) rated the actual target sentences on a scale of 1 to 5. They were asked to tick "1" if they did not use the sentence

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<sup>18</sup> See Appendix 1



at all in their daily conversations and “5” if they used it very frequently in their daily conversations.

### ***Procedures***

Participants were tested individually in a classroom or room. They were asked to read the sentences carefully for understanding and to tick with a cross their degree of agreement with each of the sentences according to the frequency of use in their daily routines. There were two negative responses in the five-point scale – “1” meant that they strongly disagreed with the use of that sentence in their daily conversations, and “2”, that they disagreed with the use of that sentence; one neutral answer – “3” meant that they neither agreed or disagreed; and two positive responses – “4” meaning that they agreed with its use in their daily routines, and “5” represented that they strongly agreed with its use in their conversations. The entire procedure lasted 5 minutes per participant.

### ***Analysis***

We reported analyses for four conditions: women aged between 18-26 years old, men aged 18-26 years old, women aged 27-60 and men aged 27-60 years old. To determine the influence of the gender on the use of discourse markers, we first stratified the findings by gender, comparing the condition of the 18-26 aged women with the 27-60 aged women, on the one hand, and the condition of the 18-26 aged men with the 27-60 aged men, on the other hand.

## **3.2 RESULTS**

The results were calculated according to the five-point Likert scale, measuring the degree of agreement (from “strongly agree” to “strongly disagree”) and the number of people who ticked each agreement. We analysed the data with a calculus of the frequency every group used each expression with, as shown below.

In the female condition, we predicted that both groups of young adult (aged 18-26) and normal adult (27-60) women would use discourse markers involving diminutives, affective words, euphemisms, but that the young adults would use them more frequently than the normal adults, since the latter present a more mature discourse but including the use of many love. The

findings provided partial support for our hypothesis, offering evidence for the use of all the items characterized as female discourse markers plus the neutral ones as being used by both groups of women, as shown in Fig. 1 and Fig. 2.

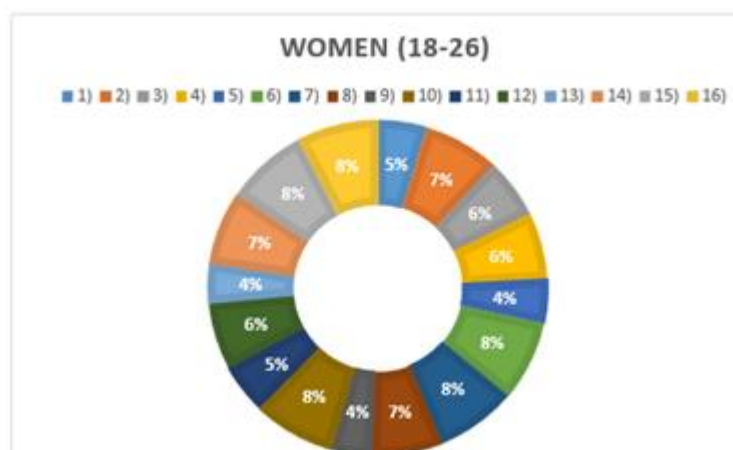


Figure 1: Results for the condition women aged 18-26

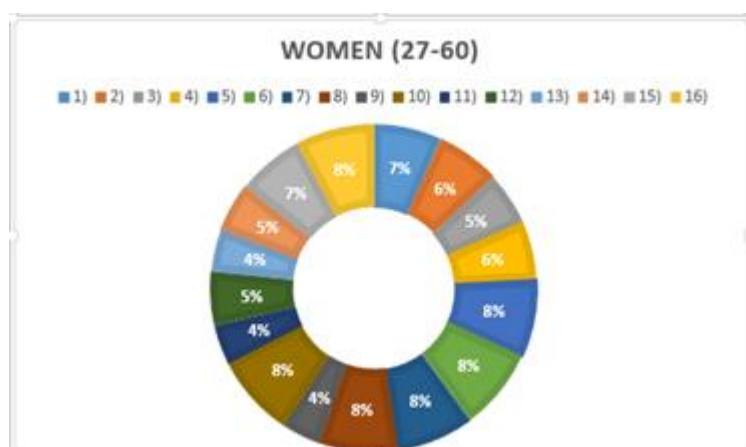
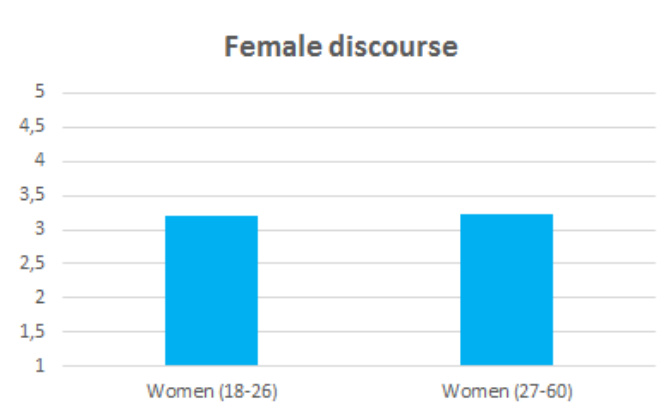


Figure 2: Results for the condition women aged 27-60

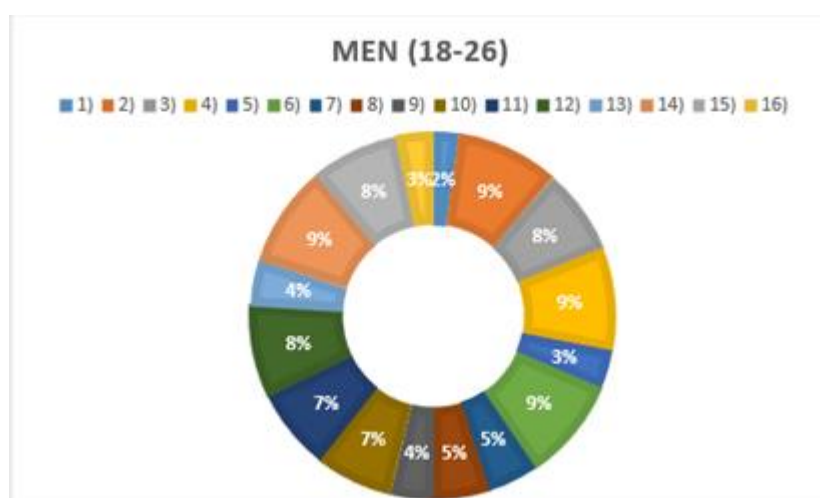
However, there were some unexpected results, as shown in Figure 3, since women aged 18-26 ( $M= 3.2$ ;  $SD= 0.73$ ) did not employ the female discourse markers more frequently than the ones aged 27-60 ( $M= 3.2$ ;  $SD= 0.81$ ).



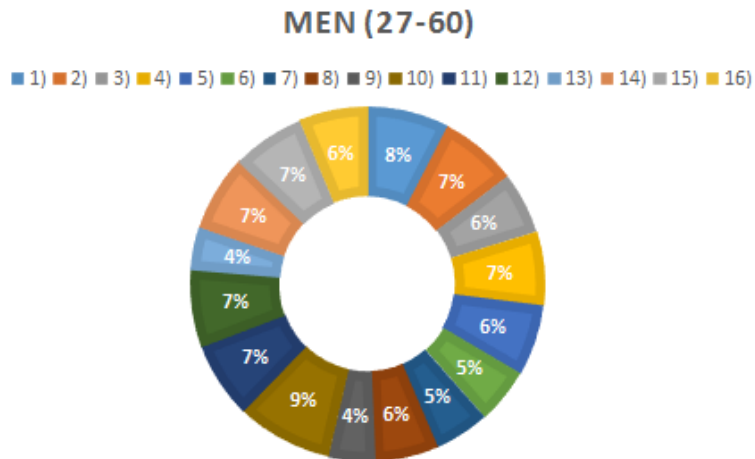
**Figure 3: Comparison of the female young adult group with the female adult group**

In both groups, boosters seem to be the most frequently used markers in female discourse (items 7, 10 and 16) and also some swearing expressions (items 2, 6). The latter marker does not accomplish the expectations of this survey.

In the male condition, we expected both groups of men (young adults aged 18-26 and adults aged 27-60) to use male markers (such as swearing and slang, avoiding affective expressions and all kinds of lexical changes as diminutives or boosters). Our prediction obtained full support from the results. All the items characteristic of male discourse, namely: 2, 4, 6, 11, 12, 13 and 14, were used by the male young adult group ( $M= 2.8$ ;  $SD= 0.11$ ) and by the adult group ( $M= 2.7$ ;  $SD= 5.4$ ), as shown in Figs. 4 and 5. The findings also offer evidence that men seldom employ the neutral items (10 and 15) in both conditions.

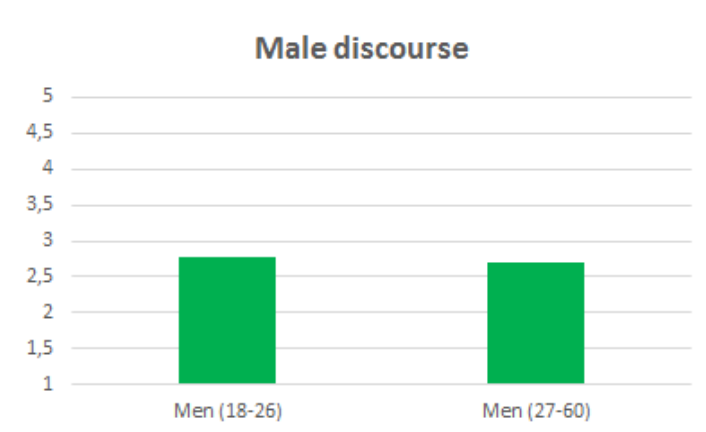


**Figure 4: Results for the condition men aged 18-26**



**Figure 5: Results for the condition men aged 27-60**

The results provide further support for the prediction that the use of male discourse markers would be higher in the male young adult group than in the male adult group, as shown in Fig. 6.



**Figure 6: Comparison of the male young adult group with the male adult group**

Finally to examine the effects of age and gender on the use of discourse markers in the four conditions (i.e. women aged 18-26, women aged 27-60, men aged 18-26 and men aged 27-60), we conducted a one way ANOVA. This analysis revealed that there were statistically significant differences between these four conditions , as shown in Table 1, providing thus additional support for our prediction  $F(3.60)= 1.85, p < 0.05$ .

**Table 1: One way: ANOVA**

<i>Source of variation</i>	<i>SS</i>	<i>df</i>	<i>MS</i>	<i>F</i>	<i>P-value</i>	<i>F crit</i>
<b>Between Groups</b>	3.72442325	3	1.241474417	1.85746558	0.1464737	2.758078316
<b>Within Groups</b>	40.10220475	60	0.668370079			
<b>Total</b>	43.826628	63				

### 3.3 DISCUSSION

I have demonstrated that there is a clear distinction between the male and female discourse use. The results of the survey reveal that women tend to use affective markers, as diminutives and boosters, especially the group of adult women aged 27-60, although the total difference between both groups is not statistically significant (see Figure 1 above).

However, there is also an unexpected data in the first condition –women aged 18-26- that reveals a change in the discourse of the female young group. It indicates that this group often uses the same discourse markers as men, namely swearing and slang. This result would verify a change in Lakoff's (1973) traditional thought about the weakness of women in speech. As we studied in section 2 of this paper, Lakoff supports the theory that female markers in discourse use are caused by their weak personality, opposite to men who tend to look more confident and less affective in their discourse. But this survey demonstrates a possible change in women's discourse use according to this theory, because there is barely any difference in the results on the use of swearing and slang between young women (aged 18-26) and men.

Furthermore, the survey indicates that men do not tend to use any of the female discourse markers. Opposing to women's results, the adult men condition is less prone to use male markers than the young group, although the difference is, once more, statistically irrelevant (see Figure 2).

Thus, we can conclude that there is appreciable significant distinction between both uses of discourse, not only regarding gender but also age. Despite the insignificant inequalities in terms of the age differences, the results reveal that this is an influential factor in the distinction of both discourses.

## CONCLUSION

Virtual communication includes many proper features which make it different from face-to-face communication. However, virtual communication lacks the semiotic and paralinguistic elements (tone of voice, gestures, the contextual environment, etc.) which complete the context of the utterances in face-to-face communication. Thus, it has resorted some strategies, such as textual deformation, emoticons, images, videos, etc., to fill such a gap especially in some social networks such as *Facebook*. These strategies facilitate the analysis and recognition of female and male discourse. Hence, we analysed the aspectual features to both types of discourses used to establish a difference between female and male discourse markers: for example, women resort to affective expressions by using diminutives, boosters or expressing love; whereas men tend to resort to slang and swearing making their discourse less affective. Nevertheless, to test this hypothesis, we conducted an experimental survey with forty-eight subjects –twenty-four men and twenty-four women- whose results revealed that there was a statistically significant difference between female and male discourse. In conclusion, women and men use different discourse markers –diminutives, swearing, tag questions, etc.- which make their respective discourses recognizable and allow us to distinguish two different gender identities when women and men interact on *Facebook* only by looking at the way in which they interact. However, this may be changing, as the discourse of young women seems to increasingly resemble that of both young men and men. Some further research is needed to account for this change in female discourse use.

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## APPENDIX 1

Sexo: M / F

EDAD: \_\_\_\_\_

Indique, en primer lugar, su sexo y edad antes de comenzar la encuesta.

Sus respuestas, confidenciales y anónimas, tienen por objeto recoger su opinión sobre el grado de acuerdo o desacuerdo con el uso que hace Vd. de ciertas expresiones cotidianas. Por tanto, las respuestas deben ser personales y honestas.

Por favor, marque con una cruz el número de tu declaración que mejor representa tu nivel de acuerdo. Muy de acuerdo= 1 Algo de acuerdo= 2 Ni de acuerdo ni en desacuerdo= 3 Algo en desacuerdo= 4 Muy en desacuerdo= 5.

Agradezco su tiempo y colaboración.

	MUY DE ACUERDO	ALGO DE ACUERDO	NI DE ACUERDO NI EN DESACUERDO	ALGO EN DESACUERDO	MUY EN DESACUERDO
1) Buenísimo el día de hoy y la comidita sobre todo.					
2) ¿Qué coño es eso?					
3) ¡Es que son tontos del culo!					
4) No puedo, picha, tengo muchas cosas que hacer.					
5) ¡El sabadito te espero con el jamoncito fresquito y las copitas!					
6) Una hostia le daba...					
7) Sois súper especiales y no cambiaría mi grupo por ningún otro.					
8) ¡Por dios, que me sacáis los colores!					
9) Aquí no cierran tan temprano, pero ceno a las 5:30-6.					
10) Precioso el detalle.					
11) ¡Serás mamón! Vamos a vernos con unas birras de por medio.					



12) A ver si nos vemos este finde, máquina.					
13) Y pensar que hace 24 horas estábamos quedando 11º en una puta carrera con de la Rosa...					
14) Muy en serio, me tienen hasta los cojones...					
15) ¡Jo, qué envidia!					
16) Es muy bebé. Solo tiene un añito recién cumplido je,je.					

## APPENDIX 2

Table 1 presents the frequency of use of each expression. The column on the left represents all the items used in the survey. The results have been calculated according to the scale of agreement (from “strongly agree” to “strongly disagree”) and the number of people who ticked each agreement. Then, the results were divided into 12 people belonging to each condition.

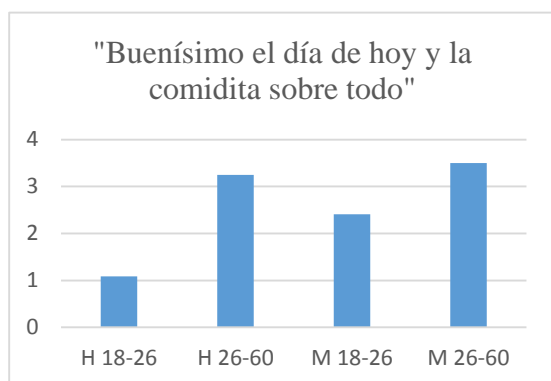
**Table 1: General results for the four conditions**

	Men (18-26)	Men (27-60)	Women (18-26)	Women (27-60)
1)	1.083	3.25	2.41	3.5
2)	4.083	3.083	3.75	3.25
3)	3.33	2.417	3	2.75
4)	4.083	2.917	3.33	2.9
5)	1.5	2.75	2.17	3.917
6)	4.083	2.17	4	4.17
7)	2	2.17	4	4.17
8)	2.17	2.5	3.5	3.83
9)	1.67	1.83	2.083	2
10)	3.083	3.75	3.83	4.25
11)	3.17	3	2.5	2
12)	3.58	3.083	3.33	2.75
13)	1.75	1.67	2	2.17
14)	4	3.083	3.7	2.5
15)	3.417	2.83	3.83	3.417
16)	1.417	2.67	3.83	4.083

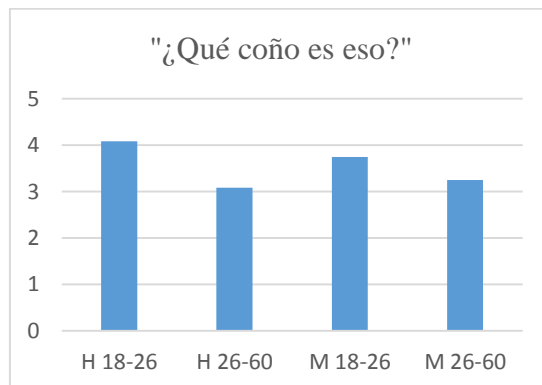
### APPENDIX 3

In this figures, the four conditions are represented according to the frequency that they use each item contained in the survey.

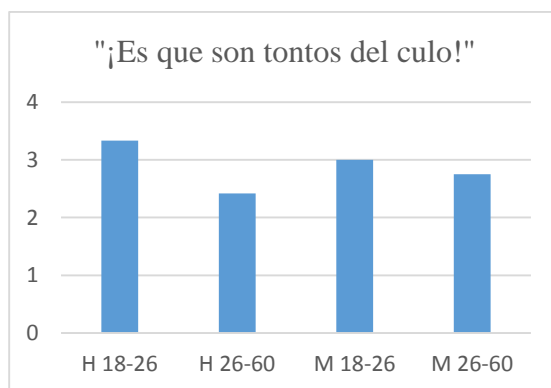
Graphic 1



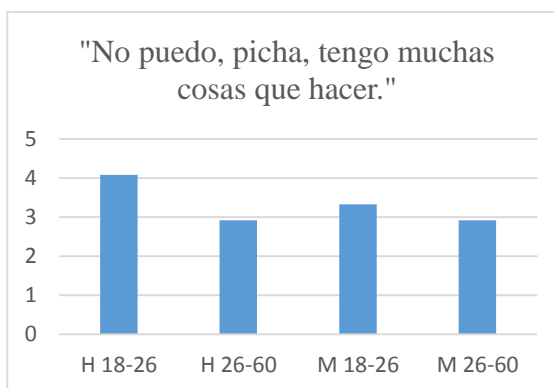
Graphic 2



Graphic 3

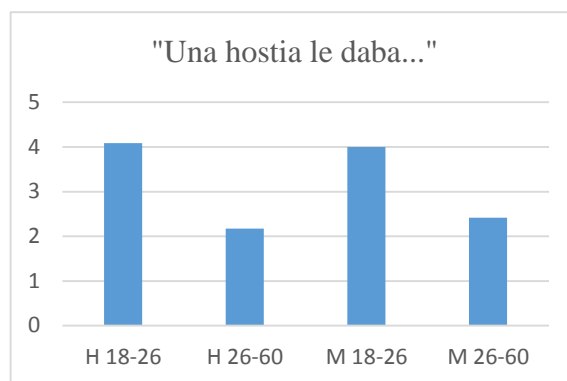
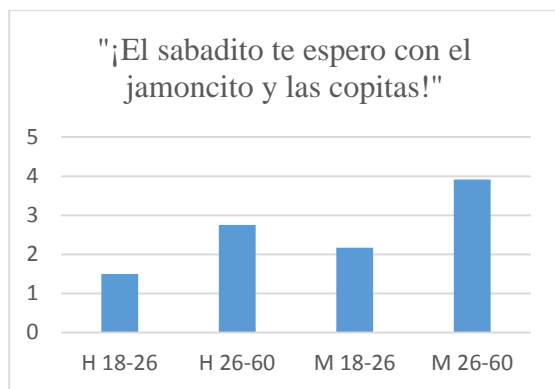


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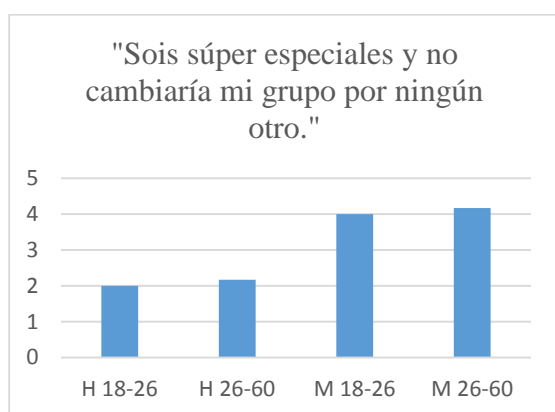


Graphic 5

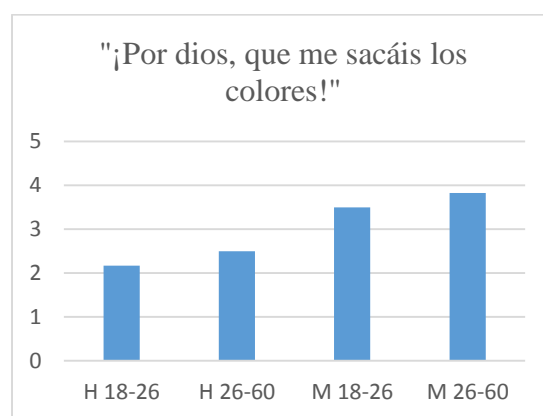
Graphic 6



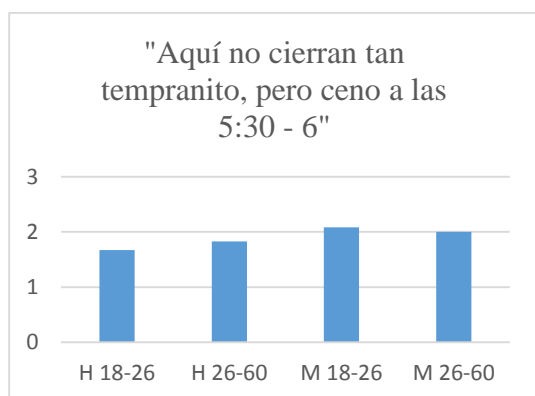
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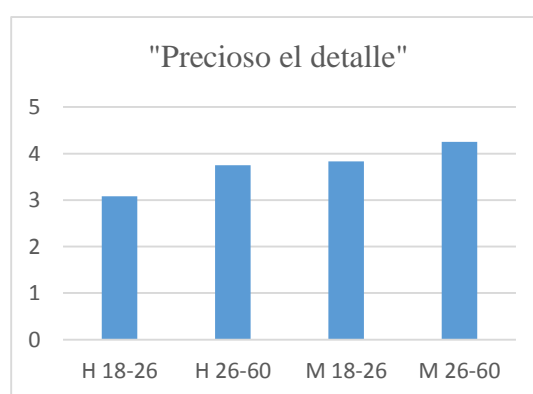
Graphic 8



Graphic 9

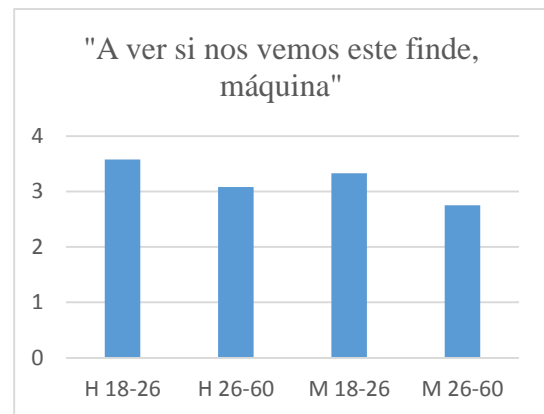
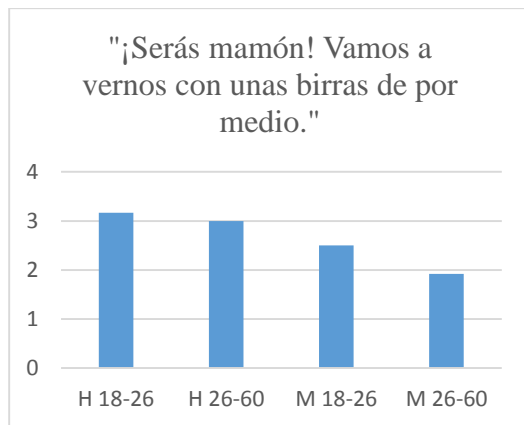


Graphic 10

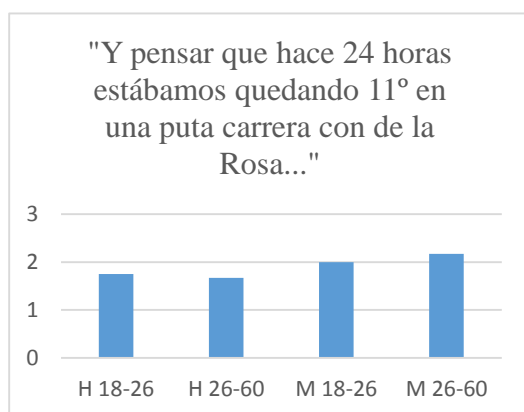


Graphic 11

Graphic 12



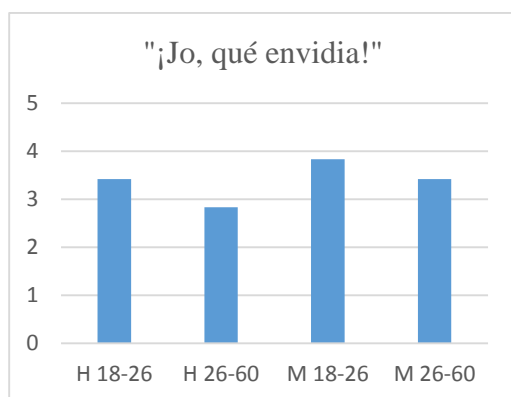
Graphic 13



Graphic 14



Graphic 15



Graphic 16

